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ABSTRACT

Described is the development of an instrument to evaluate the relationship between expenditures and effectiveness of special education programs. It is explained that the quality indicator instrument, developed through the Delphi process and refined through item analysis, consists of 38 items in seven areas, including instructional setting, instructional process, administrative support and information systems, and integration with regular classrooms. Included is a sample instrument and scoring sheet. (CL)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION INDICATORS OF QUALITY

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Rationale

This instrument was designed for use in a study of the relationship between expenditures and the effectiveness of programs in special education.

Since the amount spent on a given special education program could, in part, determine the program's characteristics, it may be theorized that higher expenditures mean higher quality.

Moreover, the quality of the instructional program should influence pupil achievement. It follows that each criterion or indicator of quality should be an essential characteristic in terms of impact on children.

Therefore, the researchers sought items or criteria that were likely to (1) reflect significant program characteristics and (2) be recognized as important by a consensus of individuals knowledgeable about special education.

Procedure for Item Construction

A pool of 200 items was developed through a comprehensive review of the literature in the field. To refine and expand this pool, interviews were held with authorities on special education in the Pennsylvania Department of Education, with special educators on college faculties (teacher preparation), with supervisors and teachers in school special education programs, and with parents and officers of various advocacy groups concerned about special education. These items were then presented to consultants, including staff of Research for Better Schools and selected intermediate unit special education directors, for suggestions about redundancies and areas not covered. A special survey of 50 special education teachers was also conducted for this purpose.

An instrument consisting of 63 items resulted from these activities. Through the Delphi technique, that instrument would be refined further.

The Delphi technique was chosen because of its ability to produce, over successive administrations, a consensus by a large variety of experts on which items should be retained as especially important or significant measures of the quality of a special education program.

The Delphi Sample

Four groups were chosen to act as Delphi respondents: special education supervisors, teachers, college faculty and advocacy group members.

The supervisors and teachers were randomly selected from computer printouts available from the Division of Educational Statistics of the Bureau of Information Systems in the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The college special education faculty members were chosen randomly from various catalogues and lists. Where faculty members were not specifically described in the catalogue as special education faculty, or where no catalogue was available, the research staff wrote letters asking for the names of faculty members specializing in this area. The members of the advocacy group were selected randomly from lists of personnel in associations for the handicapped and from membership lists of parent and advocacy groups known to represent the official views of these groups.

The lists thus compiled were subjected to random sampling to obtain an initial sample list of 300 teachers, 100 supervisors, 100 special education faculty and 100 advocacy group spokespersons. These lists were reduced further by deleting the people who did not wish to participate. At this point, 187 teachers, 86 supervisors, 91 faculty and 57 advocates were available as respondents. The pool of 63 items was then sent to these consenting participants.

The Delphi Consensus Process

The basic intent of the Delphi technique is to achieve a consensus. A convergence of ratings (reduced variability) over succeeding administrations of the rating scale, when feedback concerning group response is given, indicates that consensus has been achieved or at least maximized. The items surviving this process were to be placed in the final instrument used in the study.

A form containing 63 items was sent to each consenting participant for his or her response. Of the 187 consenting teachers, 113 (60.4 per cent) responded; of the 86 consenting supervisors, 66 (76.7 per cent) responded; of the 91 consenting special education faculty, 62 (68.1 per cent) responded; and of the 57 consenting advocates, 37 (64.9 per cent) responded.

The instructions asked each of the respondents to give his or her judgement as to "how important each of the present indicators of quality is in terms of impact on children." They were asked to do this by rating each item on a scale from one to five, with one representing little or no impact and five representing high impact. A rating of six, No Judgement, was permitted if the respondent did not feel competent to make the required evaluation.

In addition to these ratings, the respondents were asked to add any items they believed reflected other important characteristics which should have been included.

The responses were tabulated, and the median response (rating) for each of the 63 items was determined. A new version of the instrument was then prepared. In this new version the median rating given by the subjects as a whole was underlined and the respondent's previous rating was circled in red. The subjects were then asked whether they wished to change their response and, if so, to circle their new choice if it differed from the group choice. In addition, they were asked to rate the impact of seven new items derived from suggestions made by respondents in round one.

There were 86 teachers, 58 supervisors, 49 faculty and 23 advocates who responded to the second-round instrument of 70 items (63 original items plus 7 new items). This was 76.1 per cent of the teachers, 87.9 per cent of the supervisors, 79.0 per cent of the college faculty and 62.2 per cent of the advocacy group who had responded to the first-round instrument.

The attrition between the number saying they would be willing to participate and the number participating in the second round of the Delphi process was 54 per cent for the teachers, 32.6 per cent for the supervisors, 46.2 per cent for the special education faculty and 59.6 per cent for the advocacy group. It was assumed that the declines (1) were not serious enough to warrant rejection of the findings, (2) grossly reflected the degree to which each group felt competent to judge the items (with the supervisors and special education faculty feeling the most competent and the teachers and advocates feeling the least competent) and (3) were partly a function of the fact that responses were requested during the summer vacation.

When each item was examined for the best combination of a high impact rating and a low variability among ratings, it was found that 16 of the 70 items had relatively high standard deviation values. These 16 items (s.d. greater than 0.86) also tended to have a lower median rating (4.06) than the items retained (4.56).

To answer the question of whether it was justifiable to analyze the responses of the raters as a whole rather than as differing according to their category (teacher, supervisors, faculty, advocate), the following analyses were done:

Round One

	Items	Mean	S.D.	Variance
Teachers (113)	63	4.234	.348	.121
Supervisors (66)	63	4.288	.326	.106
Faculty (62)	63	4.280	.347	.121
Advocates (37)	63	4.142	.357	.128

Coefficients of Correlations

	1	2	3	4
Teachers	1.00	.89	.84	.72
Supervisors		1.00	.82	.65
Faculty			1.00	.72
Advocates				1.00

Round Two

	Items	Mean	S.D.	Variance
Teachers (86)	70	4.387	.364	.133
Supervisors (58)	70	4.432	.324	.105
Faculty (49)	70	4.391	.367	.135
Advocates (23)	70	4.484	.366	.134

Coefficients of Correlations

	1	2	3	4
Teachers	1.00	.93	.84	.78
Supervisors		1.00	.85	.81
Faculty			1.00	.77
Advocates				1.00

The statistics were deemed sufficiently close in value and the correlations high enough to warrant the assumption of high agreement between the various groups. Therefore, all responses were combined to determine which items had a high degree of consensus and were considered most important in their impact on children.

The Resulting Quality Indicator Instrument

The Delphi process resulted in an instrument consisting of 54 items which were placed into the following categories recommended by personnel from the Division of Special Education of the Pennsylvania Department of Education:

1. instructional setting
2. instructional techniques and related components
3. records and reporting
4. diagnosis and evaluation
5. staff qualifications, training and development
6. supervision and administration
7. integration with the regular classroom
8. program offerings and services

The category "instructional setting" attempts to measure the physical flexibility of the classroom for all instructional purposes. The items categorized as "instructional techniques" reflect the systematic use of individualized instruction, measurement of skills at entry level and current performance, and specific instructional objectives suited to each level of mastery. The "records and reporting" items reflect the maintenance of systematic and periodic records designed to permit an accurate assessment of each child's strengths and weaknesses in specific skill areas, including the results of professional examinations (vision, hearing, neurological, psychiatric, etc.) and any follow-up findings after appropriate placement. The category "diagnosis and evaluation" contains items concerning the early (preschool, where possible) identification of problem children coupled with immediate follow-tnrough, using, wherever possible, team evaluation by a variety of specialists, including the teacher. Periodic reevaluation and parental consent for placement are also emphasized.

The "staff qualifications, training and development" items reflect the degree to which certified personnel are used or appropriate in-service training and experience exist to upgrade the staff, with full participation by staff members. The "supervision and administration" items reflect the degree to which the supervisor allots time for and encourages parent/staff conferences, develops community awareness of the program and provides leadership in the introduction of needed and beneficial changes based on new knowledge or changes in legislation. The items categorized as "integration into the regular classroom" reflect the degree and effectiveness of integration. The "program offerings and services" items reflect the adequacy of programs and the degree to which special services are available to the student or his/her parents, including the services of a registered nurse, a physical therapist, a vocational guidance counselor, a speech and hearing clinician, etc., at every level of schooling over the entire range of exceptional children, including the homebound and the multiply handicapped.

Field Testing

Four members of the research division task force visited three schools offering classes for the trainable mentally retarded (TMR), the educable mentally retarded (EMR), the physically handicapped (PH) and the socially and emotionally disturbed (SED).

These four acted in teams of two. Both teams observed each class in a counter-balanced order over a period of two days, so that no class was observed by both teams on the same day. Using the 54-item Indicator of Quality instrument developed through the Delphi process the researchers found that the criteria for rating each item seemed workable and that there was good agreement between the raters, with few instances of a difference of more than one on the scale of one to five.

To increase reliability, a decision was made to arrive at one rating through a consensual decision process rather than using separate ratings for each of the two observers. Full-scale use of the instrument was then begun, using trained graduate students from The Pennsylvania State University as observers. These students, in teams of two, observed 388 clases. There were 74 classes for the trainable mentally retarded, 150 classes for the educable mentally retarded, 45 classes for the physically handicapped, 39 classes for the brain injured and 80 classes for the emotionally and socially disturbed. These numbers reflect sample shrinkage due to such factors as teacher strikes. The precise breakdown by type of school and category of exceptionality is found in the following table:

Category of Exceptionality	Total	Type of School: Elem.	Sec.	Inner-City	Metro.	Suburban	Rural	Mixed
EMR	150	73	77	32	42	39	37	0
TMR	74	44	30	15	19	15	25	0
PH	45	28	17	3	5	9	10	18
SED	80	41	39	21	19	20	20	0
BI	39	25	14	0	0	0	0	39
TOTAL	388	211	177	71	85	83	92	57

The results from these 388 observations were then used to perform a succession of items analyses which assessed the effectiveness of individual items and the reliability of subscale and total scores.

The Item Analysis Results

The four successive item analyses resulted in a reduction of the number of items from 54 to 38. The items dropped were those that (1) did not discriminate significantly (.01 level) between high and low scoring groups (highest and lowest 27%) in the sample, (2) did not correlate well with its own subscale score, (3) did not correlate more strongly with its own subscale score than with the other subscales' scores and (4) did not correlate well with the total score.

As a result of item rejection or placement into a different subscale, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for the total score did not change much, but values for the category subscales did change substantially, as shown below:

Subscale Alpha Reliabilities

Item Analysis	Total Items	Inst. Set.	Inst. Tech.	Rec. and Rep.	Diag. and Eval.	Staff. Qual. Trng.	Supr. and Admin.	Integ. Reg. Class	Prog. Off. Serv.	Total Score
First	54	.77	.90	.64	.54	.34	.27	.81	.62	.86
Last	38	.87	.92	.64	.71	.52	.59	.85	.70	.87

Six of the eight subscales had an Alpha of .70 or better and were potentially useful. The commonality analysis that was used later, however, suggested a need for fewer subscales. Therefore, the researchers attempted to reduce the number of subscales through factor analysis.

Factor Analysis Findings

The original 54 items were subjected to a factor analysis using various rotations. The analysis resulted in a 16-factor solution that broke the scales down into a large number of single-item factors. Successive runs were conducted to get solutions with anywhere from two to eight factors. Analysis of these findings indicated that the best solution, i.e., the one that best preserved the original subscales while reducing the total number of subscales, was the four-factor solution. These four factors (new subscales) consisted of 38 items and were labeled as follows:

Alpha		
(.92)	I.	Instructional Process--11 items
(.83)	II.	Instructional Setting--13 items
(.75)	III.	Administrative Support and Information Systems--9 items
(.85)	IV.	Integration with regular Classrooms--5 items

The 38 items had a Cronbach Alpha of 0.87 when subjected to a Likert analysis, while the individual subscales had the Alpha's shown above in parentheses. The items rejected by the Likert process were also rejected by the four-factor solution.

The descriptive statistics for these factor scales, based on 388 classes, follow:

Factor	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Measurement
I.	11	.915	40.50	8.28	2.41
II.	13	.827	46.60	8.93	3.72
III.	9	.734	35.08	6.00	3.09
IV.	5	.848	14.70	6.58	2.56
Total	38	.873	136.87	19.44	6.94

The factor subscales correlated with one another as follows:

	I	II	III	IV
I		.423	.342	.058
II			.249	.146
III				.046
IV				

No subscale had more than 16 per cent variance in common with any other subscale, and the median correlation was .20, i.e., the subscales overall tended to have only 4 per cent common variance. They are, therefore, relatively independent measures with acceptable internal consistency, as reflected by their Cronbach Alpha values.

These findings led to a decision to use the four subscales derived from the factor analysis in analyzing the results.

Items one to eleven on the attached 38-item instrument labeled Instructional Process and Related Components are those assigned to Factor Scale I, Instructional Process. Items labeled Instructional Setting and those labeled Program and Services have been assigned to Factor Scale II, Instructional Setting. Items labeled Records and Reporting, Diagnosis and Evaluation, or Supervision and Administration have been assigned to Factor Scale III, Administrative Support and Information Systems. Finally, those items labeled as Integration with the Regular Classroom Program comprise Factor Scale IV.

Limitations of the Quality Indicator Instrument

As of now, no test-retest reliability has been computed to see whether the observed criteria tend to be stable over time. Further, the instrument reflects only the consensual opinion of experts (Delphi technique) as to which quality characteristics will have an impact on the child. Further validation to see which subscales or items actually do predict achievement by the special education student is required.

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INDICATORS OF QUALITY

A. Instructional Process and Related Components

Definition: These involve the skillful use and thoughtful preparation of teaching techniques that promote motivation and participation, that gain the attention of the students, that meet the needs of the individual student. This includes the systematic use of individualized instructional techniques. There are comprehensive and specific instructional objectives suited to each level of mastery.

1. The teacher has comprehensive and specific objectives for all pupils.

1	2	3	4	5
Some evidence of good objectives		Objectives quite comprehensive and specific		To an outstanding degree

2. The teacher skillfully gains and maintains the attention of students.

1	2	3	4	5
Most students inattentive		Attention obtained from many students		Attention obtained from all students

3. The teacher encourages each student to participate in learning activities.

1	2	3	4	5
Achieved participation by few		Achieved some participation by many		Achieved maximum participation of all

4. The work assigned is based upon needs, interests and ability of each child.

1	2	3	4	5
Little evidence of adapting work to students		Work is adapted to students' needs, interests and abilities		Work is adapted to each student's interests and abilities

5. The teacher adjusts the techniques used to the needs of each student.

1	2	3	4	5
Little adjustment, if any		Some adjustment of techniques		Techniques adjusted for each student

6. The teacher checks individual student progress frequently.

1	2	3	4	5
Little checking of student progress		Checked student progress once or twice of at least half the class		Frequently checked progress of each student

7. The teacher encourages and effectively handles student questions.

1	2	3	4	5
Little encouragement and poor handling of questions		Moderate encouragement of and effective handling of questions		Skillfully encourages and very effectively handles questions

8. The teacher uses training aids effectively.

1	2	3	4	5
Training aids not very effectively used		Training aids used reasonably well		Training aids most effectively used to expedite learning

9. Programs for all special education students provided for individual differences.

1	2	3	4	5
Makes provision for less than half of the pupils		Makes provision for at least half of the pupils		Teacher knows and suggests next step for each student as he or she needs it

10. The teacher uses individual diagnosis and prescription techniques.

1	2	3	4	5
Work adapted to few students' ability and experience		Work adapted to many students' ability and experience		Work well adapted to each student's ability and experience

11. The time scheduling of special education students reflects an awareness of individual capabilities and tolerances.

1	2	3	4	5
Some evidence		Done reasonably well		Optimum time scheduling reflecting sensitivity to individual capabilities and tolerances

8. Instructional Setting

Definition: The classroom is physically flexible, permitting diversity of activities related directly to the instructional plans of the teacher, i.e., one that does not place constraints upon the implementation of any instructional strategy. Furnishing are appropriate to the characteristics of the children to be served and des gned to facilitate the instructional process. The classroom is within a regular school setting or within ready access to a regular school setting. Adequate and appropriate space and facilities are provided for itinerant services.

12. The special education classroom is flexible enough to allow a diversity of activities.

1	2	3	4	5
Rigid, structured seating, no carrels, no possibility of setting up special areas		Some evidence of possibility of alternative settings		Considerable flexibility is evident

13. Space in the classroom is adequate for the children enrolled.

1	2	3	4	5
Constrained space		Adequate space		Optimum space

14. Furniture in the classroom is adequate for the children enrolled.

1	2	3	4	5
Ill-fitted, difficult to use, insufficient		Suitable, easy to use		Very suitable, easy to use

15. Equipment in the classroom is adequate for the children enrolled.

1	2	3	4	5
Inappropriate or insufficient		Adequate		Very appropriate

16. The special education room includes alternative learning centers.

1	2	3	4	5
Not evident		Evident to a satisfactory degree		Very effectively included

17. Adequate classroom space and appropriate facilities are provided for itinerant services.

1	2	3	4	5
Space not appropriate		Space is appropriate		Space designed and built for these purposes

C. Program and Services

Definition: Special services are available to the student or his parents, including the services of a certified school psychologist, a physical therapist, a vocational guidance counselor, a speech and hearing clinician, etc. These services are provided at every level of education. The programs and services provided are capable of meeting the needs of the total range of exceptional children, including the multiply handicapped and include a parent education program.

18. There is a continuum of programs and services through all school ages.

1	2	3	4	5
None available		Available for some		Available for all

19. The program has provisions for the total range and incidence of exceptionality including multiply handicapped.

1	2	3	4	5
No provisions		Provisions for some		Provisions for all

20. A parent education program (parental involvement) is an integral part of the special education program.

1	2	3	4	5
No planned effort or planned program		Adequate effort made		Excellent program

21. A speech program is provided to serve speech-impaired children of all exceptionalities from kindergarten through 12th grade.

1	2	3	4	5
Not available		Available for some		Available for all

22. Itinerant vision and hearing teachers work with kindergarten children.

1	2	3	4	5
No kindergarten children		Some kindergarten children		All kindergarten children

23. The services of a physical therapist are available for students who require them.

1	2	3	4	5
Not available		Available for some		Available for all

24. A public relations effort maintains community awareness of and interest in special education.

1	2	3	4	5
No planned effort		Adequate effort		Excellent effort with organized program

D. Records and Reporting

Definition: The maintenance of systematic and periodic records facilitates an accurate assessment of each child's educational progress, and his strengths and weaknesses in each specific skill area of concern. Such records are based upon appropriate normative standards and measures. This file should also include records of the results of professional examinations including vision and hearing screenings, neurological screening, and, where indicated, psychiatric evaluations. It should include any follow-up diagnostic findings that follow placement of a child in the special education setting in addition to preplacement evaluation. With proper safeguards, parents or guardians are given access to the file upon request and are informed of this right.

25. Appropriate examination records for each child, including psychological, vision and hearing screening, are on file.

1	2	3	4	5
The records do not exist for every child		Records exist for each child but in some cases not complete or up-to-date		Records exist for each child, are complete and up-to-date and are accessible to teacher

26. Continual records (cumulative growth) of the student's attainment and progress are maintained.

1	2	3	4	5
Not on every child		Progress records on all but irregularly maintained		Progress records on all and regularly maintained

27. An educational assessment of each child, indicating strengths and weaknesses in specific skill areas, are on file.

1	2	3	4	5
Educational assessment not on file for every child		Educational assessment on file for each child but not always made within last three years		On file for each child and made within last three years

E. Diagnosis and Evaluation

Definition: Diagnosis and evaluation involves early (preschool, where possible) and comprehensive identification of "high risk" children coupled with immediate follow-through of prescription, assignment and appropriate individualized instruction, using, wherever possible, team evaluation by a psychiatrist, a neurologist, etc. The special education teacher is fully capable of performing initial assessment of academic status and recognizing special problems for referral and specialized evaluation. Comprehensive evaluation for possible educational reassignment is conducted at intervals of two years. It is also conducted annually where transfer to a different type of program or service is contemplated, or upon parental request. Parental consent is obtained for transfer.

28. Preschool screening is available.

1	2	3	4	5
Done for some		Done for many		Done for all

29. There is early and comprehensive identification of "high risk" school-age children and immediate follow-through of individual prescription and instruction.

1	2	3	4	5
Some children are identified early		Most children are identified early and follow-through occurs soon		All problem children are identified early and immediate follow-through occurs

30. The educational assignment of every special education student is reevaluated not less than every two years.

1	2	3	4	5
Done for some		Done for many		Done for all

F. Supervision and Administration

Definition: The special education supervisor allots adequate time for and encourages staff/parent conferences periodically. The administrative staff attempts to maintain, by appropriate means, community awareness of the program and to stimulate public interest in the special education program. In working with the staff, the administrator or supervisor provides leadership in the introduction of needed and beneficial program changes and is cognizant of legislative and policy criteria relative to the special education program or planned change.

31. The supervisor provides leadership in introducing needed and beneficial program changes.

1	2	3	4	5
Little leadership		Regular and adequate leadership		Provides excellent leadership

32. Time is alloted and encouragement given for staff/parent conferences.

1	2	3	4	5
No time allotted		To a limited extent allots time		Necessary time and encouragement given for staff/parent conferences

33. The teacher shares information with special education associates and/or other staff.

1	2	3	4	5
No information is shared with other teachers		Some information is shared		All teachers share information

G. Integration with the Regular Classroom Program

Definition: Special education students are, where feasible, integrated into regular education programs. Children are not placed in a self-contained special education classroom as the preferred placement, but rather they are given necessary supportive services adjunctive to their regular education experiences. Activities in which regular and special education children can participate appropriately are sought and routinely encouraged. Nonhandicapped children are, in turn, encouraged by faculty attitudes and curriculum to accept and help the special education child. Adequate and appropriate supportive resource staff and services are available to the children in either the self-contained classroom or in the regular classroom.

34. There is evidence of a systematic plan to integrate special education students into regular educational programs.

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence		Moderate evidence		Considerable evidence

35. Special education children placed in regular classes are provided help by resource and/or special education teachers.

1	2	3	4	5
No help		Some assistance given		All necessary assistance given

36. Pupils are given opportunities to participate in social, arts, music and physical education activities with nonhandicapped children.

1	2	3	4	5
No provision		Part of time		On a regular basis

37. There is evidence that nonhandicapped children are encouraged to accept and help special education children.

1	2	3	4	5
No evidence		Moderate evidence		Considerable evidence

38. Special education classes are located within regular schools or have ready access to them.

1	2	3	4	5
Does not have ready access		Has ready access		Located within a regular school

INDICATORS OF QUALITY
(Summary Sheet)

IU No. _____ or District _____ Class Code _____

School _____ Elem. _____ Sec. _____

Teacher _____ Observer _____

No. of children enrolled _____ Date Observed _____

Exceptionality: EMR _____ TMR _____ BI (LD) _____ SED _____ Phys. _____

A	(1)	1	2	3	4	5		(20)	1	2	3	4	5
	(2)	1	2	3	4	5		(21)	1	2	3	4	5
	(3)	1	2	3	4	5		(22)	1	2	3	4	5
	(4)	1	2	3	4	5		(23)	1	2	3	4	5
	(5)	1	2	3	4	5		(24)	1	2	3	4	5
	(6)	1	2	3	4	5	D.	(25)	1	2	3	4	5
	(7)	1	2	3	4	5		(26)	1	2	3	4	5
	(8)	1	2	3	4	5		(27)	1	2	3	4	5
	(9)	1	2	3	4	5	E.	(28)	1	2	3	4	5
	(10)	1	2	3	4	5		(29)	1	2	3	4	5
	(11)	1	2	3	4	5		(30)	1	2	3	4	5
B.	(12)	1	2	3	4	5	F.	(31)	1	2	3	4	5
	(13)	1	2	3	4	5		(32)	1	2	3	4	5
	(14)	1	2	3	4	5		(33)	1	2	3	4	5
	(15)	1	2	3	4	5	G.	(34)	1	2	3	4	5
	(16)	1	2	3	4	5		(35)	1	2	3	4	5
	(17)	1	2	3	4	5		(36)	1	2	3	4	5
C.	(18)	1	2	3	4	5		(37)	1	2	3	4	5
	(19)	1	2	3	4	5		(38)	1	2	3	4	5

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